

# The Florida Senate

Interim Project Report Summary 2000-32

October 1999

Committee on Education

Senator Anna Cowin, Chairman

# TASK FORCE ON SCHOOL SAFETY

#### SUMMARY

National Education Goal 7 provides that by the year 2000, all schools in America will be free of drugs and violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol, and offer a disciplined environment that is conducive to learning. Florida's education goals include working with communities and schools to provide an environment that is drug-free and protects students' health, safety, and civil rights. The Florida Department of Education's public education strategic plan for FY 2000-2005 includes objectives related to school safety. In addition, safety and discipline issues must be addressed in this year's individual school improvement plans.

The President of the Senate appointed a bipartisan task force to address the issue of school safety. This report points out some of the challenges and opportunities identified by the task force to enhance school safety. One of the task force's major recommendations is to further promote accountability and the most effective use of current state funds for safe schools. Also, while Florida schools use numerous and diverse prevention strategies, coordination of these initiatives could be improved. Other recommendations include making improvements to school incident reports and eliminating school discipline data as a basis for grading a school's performance level. Finally, there are recommendations to address discipline, student services, student reporting of suspicious and dangerous behavior at school, personnel training, and improvements to school facilities.

#### BACKGROUND

Just prior to the end of the recent school year, two events brought school safety issues back into the national spotlight.

 First, in April 1999, mass shootings occurred on the campus of Columbine High School in Colorado. The shootings were initiated by two

- students and resulted in the deaths of 15 people. Other students were wounded.
- Second, in May 1999, several students were wounded in a shooting by another student at Heritage High School in Georgia.

After these events, national headlines focused on bomb threats and emergency drills throughout the nation's schools. The Senate President directed the Education Committee to assist a Senate bipartisan task force in an interim study to focus on the incidence of increased school violence, identify ways to make our schools safe for our children, identify the appropriate role of the state in preventing school violence, and determine how the state can support local school districts in implementing local strategies.

# **METHODOLOGY**

The President of the Senate appointed eight Senate members to a bipartisan task force that held four town meetings throughout the state to gather information on school safety from interviews and testimony. Meeting participants included students, parents, school board members, school administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, school facility and security personnel, law enforcement officers, community mental health professionals, civic leaders, as well as members of PTAs and other organizations. Also, testimony was provided by local school safety task force members and former Governor Bob Martinez, the Chairman of the Select Commission on School Safety, which was convened by the Florida School Boards Association, Inc., and the Florida Sheriffs Association.

The task force built on a November 1998 Senate Education Committee recommendation on truancy and disruptive youth and focused on the state's role in making sure Florida's children are safe when they attend public schools. In this context, safe means the children are safe from harm to themselves, from classmates, and from others who may intrude on the school environment.

In support of the task force, Senate Education Committee staff researched and reviewed the literature, congressional hearing information, and Florida laws related to school safety, as well as laws and programs in other states. Staff also conducted interviews, held informal meetings with interested parties, and consulted with various parties prior to their presentations to the task force.

#### **FINDINGS**

#### **Federal Funding**

The major federal source of funds for school-based prevention activities is the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act. The funds are administered by the U.S. Department of Education for different programs (e.g., state and local educational agency program, the Governor's program, competitive grants, and the national program). The law sets forth the allocation methodology and provides for the specific use of funds. Federal aid is primarily distributed on the basis of an enrollment formula.

The Act, as reauthorized in 1994, was expanded to include violence prevention activities and imposed new accountability requirements on local education agencies. Subsequent to the reauthorization, the U.S. Department of Education developed "principles of effectiveness" which govern recipients' use of funds for certain programs, including the state and local educational agency program and the Governor's program. Under the principles of effectiveness, all specified recipients must:

- base programs on a thorough assessment of objective data about the drug and violence problems in the schools and communities served;
- establish, with the assistance of an advisory council, measurable goals and objectives and design programs to meet these goals and objectives;
- evaluate programs to assess progress toward achieving goals and objectives and use the results to refine, improve, and strengthen programs and to refine goals and objectives, as appropriate; and
- design and implement programs based on research or evaluation that provides evidence that the programs used prevent or reduce drug use, violence, or disruptive behavior.

Programs must be coordinated with other available prevention efforts to maximize the impact of all the drug and violence prevention programs and resources available to the state, school district, or community.

Under the largest program, the U.S. Department of Education awards grants to state education agencies, including the Florida Department of Education, mainly for further distribution to local education agencies. There are required thresholds for statewide activities (5%) and state program administration (4%), as well as for the distribution of funds at the local level (at least 91%). State and local plans form the basis for accountability for these funds. According to the Florida Department of Education, all Florida school districts, four university developmental research schools, and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind receive subgrant funds. These funds are used for a variety of initiatives.

Seventy percent of the minimum allocation for subgrants to local educational agencies must be used for comprehensive programs. Thirty percent must go to districts based on a state determination of greatest need for additional funds. Florida determines this need for supplemental funds by rank ordering school districts according to county risk factor data. The allocation of federal formula entitlement funds for federal fiscal year 1999-2000 provided the following districts with "greatest need" funds: Hillsborough, Miami-Dade, Orange, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Polk, and Volusia.

The Governor's program allocation includes law enforcement education partnerships and grants or contracts to local community groups and organizations. In Florida, these organizations include Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and Youth Crime Watch, as well as programs for truancy and alternatives to suspension. The funds for the Governor's program are administered by the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

Funds to the Florida Department of Education and for the Governor's program were reduced in this fiscal year, as new initiatives were undertaken (e.g., funding for drug and school safety coordinators in the middle schools through competitive grants).

The current practice of allocating federal funds by formula to all districts in the country results in:<sup>1</sup>

• the average state award approaching \$10 million.three-fifths of the school districts currently

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Congressional testimony by the Secretary for the U.S. Department of Education, February 9, 1999, and the Director of the Safe and Drug Free Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education, July 13, 1999.

- receiving grants of less than \$10,000, with the average grant providing about \$5 per student.
- ► 10 percent of the districts with the highest needs in each state sharing 30 percent of the state education agency allocation.

In Tarpon Springs, the task force heard public testimony about the impact of the recent reduction in federal funds. According to the presenters, the reduction has resulted in a smaller award of local funds, an extended school district grant application process, and difficulty in implementing programs.

#### **State Funding**

The Florida Legislature appropriates state funds in the General Appropriations Act for safe schools. Proviso language describes the allocation methodology, as well as the activities for which the funds may be used. In addition, the law (s. 232.28(6), F.S.) allows school districts to use school safety funds for added security for buses transporting disruptive or delinquent students to and from school or educational activities.

The 1999 Legislature increased the total appropriation for fiscal year 1999-2000 to \$70,350,000 from \$50,350,000 in the previous fiscal year. The funds are distributed to the local school districts by the Florida Department of Education. The 1999 law requires the distribution of \$30,000 to each district and the remaining balance must be allocated as follows: twothirds based on the latest official Florida Crime Index provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and one-third based on each district's share of the state's total weighted student enrollment. The funds may be used for the following: (1) after school programs for middle school students; (2) other improvements to enhance the learning environment, including implementation of conflict resolution strategies; (3) alternative school programs for adjudicated youth; and (4) other improvements to make the school a safe place to learn. Each district determines, based on a review of its existing programs and priorities, how much of its total allocation to use for each authorized safe schools activity.

Based on an expenditure survey by the Florida Department of Education for school year 1997-1998, most school districts reported spending the safe schools appropriation for safety and security measures.

#### **Effective Programs**

There is a growing body of scientific research on promising and effective youth violence prevention programs and strategies. The National Institute of Justice recently evaluated the impact of various federally funded crime prevention activities, including school based strategies that target all grade levels. Successful school-based strategies include the following:<sup>2</sup>

- programs aimed at building school capacity to initiate and sustain innovation.
- programs aimed at clarifying and communicating norms of behavior by establishing school rules, improving the consistency of rule enforcement, or communicating norms through school wide campaigns (e.g., anti-bullying campaigns) or ceremonies.
- comprehensive instructional programs that focus on a range of social competency skills (e.g., developing self-control, stress management, responsible decision making, social problem solving, and communication skills) and that are delivered over a long period of time.
- behavioral modification programs and programs that teach self-management skills to high-risk youths.

The report also identified promising strategies: programs that group students into smaller schools-within-schools to create smaller units, more supportive interactions, or greater flexibility in instruction; and programs that improve classroom management and that use effective instructional techniques to keep students engaged in the learning process.

In addition, national organizations have collaborated with federal partner organizations to provide, via satellite broadcast, for the dissemination of promising practices about safe and effective schools.

Prevention researchers note that the typical school has fourteen different and unique programs or practices in place at any one time to prevent problem behavior. However, they comment that current research is disproportionately focused on only one type of prevention (curricula) and advocate more systematic research about a wider range of non-curricular strategies to effectively guide schools.

The task force was impressed with the variety of programs in Florida, particularly the sophistication of the response readiness initiatives in the school districts in Broward, Miami-Dade, Duval, and Palm Beach

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Gottfredson, D.C. (1997). School-Based Crime Prevention. In Sherman, L.W., Gottfredson, D. C., MacKenzie, D., Eck, J., Reuter, P., and Bushway, S. *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising: A Report to the United States Congress.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

counties. Many of the necessary school safety components are in place; however, better coordination is needed in order for the districts to benefit from these efforts. The volume of research on a wide range of effective violence prevention strategies is not as extensive as desired. As well, the current capacity for technical assistance with safety and security issues may also be limited.

#### **Discipline**

The task force members heard testimony about disciplinary measures, including corporal punishment. At the task force meeting in Jacksonville, some school districts indicated that corporal punishment was a part of their discipline strategy and a major deterrent to serious student misbehavior.

There is some confusion about the status of the law as to whether or not it is permissible to use corporal punishment in Florida. State law does not prohibit corporal punishment in public schools. Each school district can determine whether or not to use corporal punishment according to due process and minimum force requirements.

The law allows teachers and other instructional personnel, within the framework of the school district code of student conduct, to undertake specific actions, including corporal punishment, in managing student behavior and ensuring the safety of all students in their classes and school. Alternatively, a school board may prohibit corporal punishment if it adopts or has adopted a written program of alternative control or discipline.

Teachers or other members of the instructional staff, principals or designated representatives, or bus drivers are exempt from civil or criminal liability for any action carried out in conformity with state board and district school board rules on the control, discipline, suspension, and expulsion of students. The exemption does not extend to cases involving excessive force or cruel and unusual punishment.

#### **Zero Tolerance Policies**

The task force recognizes the seriousness of making bomb threats and possessing or discharging weapons or firearms on school property and at school-sponsored events. There are criminal penalties related to firearms and destructive devices for minors under the age of 18. Also, the law provides for the secure detention of minors under the age of 18, subject to some discretion by state attorneys and judges, for offenses related to firearms. Certain children may be tried as adults for possession or discharge of weapons or firearms on

school property or unlawfully throwing, placing, or discharging destructive devices or bombs.

The federal Gun-Free Schools Act requires, as a condition of financial participation, that state law mandate the expulsion of students who bring a weapon to school, with discretion by the chief administrative officer of the school district to modify the expulsion requirement. Current state law requires school boards to adopt zero tolerance policies for crime and substance abuse. However, state law also contains some flexibility for the expulsion of a student who brings a firearm to school.

While there is some support for zero tolerance, some researchers question the effectiveness of these policies. They note that the message about harsh measures may reassure administrators, teachers, and parents. However, they also point out that there are almost no studies to evaluate the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies and indicate that a number of states have amended their policies to allow more flexibility for individual cases. Instead of rigidly adhering to harsh and extreme measures, they suggest relying on a comprehensive program of prevention and planning.<sup>3</sup>

#### **School Uniforms**

School safety task force members expressed an interest in the use of school uniforms as a deterrent to school violence and disruptive behavior by students. Current law authorizes local school boards to require the wearing of uniforms by students or impose other dress related restrictions.

The theory behind requiring school uniforms as a means of improving discipline is that the uniforms will prevent inappropriate behavior that may arise from such things as wearing gang colors, outlandish dress to gain attention, and confrontations between those who can afford to wear the latest fashions and those who cannot. Also, the uniforms will build an esprit de corps among students, instilling pride and a sense of community within the school.

Research findings on the effects of school uniforms generally support the theories; however, researchers are quick to point out that the requirement of uniforms alone will not produce lasting change. The celebrated "discipline turnaround" in Long Beach, California

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Skiba, R. and Peterson, R. "The Dark Side of Zero Tolerance: Can Punishment Lead to Safe Schools?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1999 (on-line article).

schools is widely attributed to the implementation of a school uniform requirement. Seldom mentioned, however, is that the uniforms were only one part of a fairly comprehensive revision of the school system's discipline policy.

Several school districts in Florida have adopted policies on the wearing of school uniforms. A fairly representative sample of the various policy models being used follows:

Polk County requires all elementary and middle school students to wear uniforms. Penalties for not wearing a uniform include student suspension and possible prosecution of parents for not seeing to it that their children are in school dressed in the required attire. There is a very limited opt out provision just for religious reasons.

Duval County's policy affects elementary and middle schools. For uniforms to be required, there must be an 80 percent approval vote by parents of children attending a school. There is a voluntary opt out provision and enforcement of the policy is at the local school level. Students who are opted out must adhere to the existing district dress code.

Dade County's school uniform policy is mandatory for elementary schools and determined by vote of the parents at middle schools and high schools. There are opt outs for religious and medical reasons.

Hillsborough County authorizes the wearing of school uniforms to be determined on a school by school basis. Forty-five of the district's schools allow the wearing of uniforms to be voluntary, while 49 schools require mandatory uniforms to be worn. There are opt outs for religious, medical, and personal reasons.

All four models include provisions to assure that uniforms are available to economically needy students.

# **School Safety Incident Reporting**

Public health researchers note that what has changed most dramatically over the past 20 years has been the emergence of fatal youth violence--children killing children. They further comment that while there has been a slight decrease in national youth homicide rates since 1993, the number of young people who die violently remains unacceptably high. The researchers advocate monitoring school associated non-fatal injuries, as well as violent deaths on an ongoing basis to identify emerging trends involving various

demographic subgroups.<sup>4</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now extending a study of violent deaths in schools to determine whether multiple-death incidents in the school setting represent an increasing trend and whether there is an increasing trend in overall school deaths or other aspects of school violence.

In trying to explain the threats to order in the nation's schools, many experts advocate looking at the occurrence of less serious transgressions (e.g., absenteeism, tardiness, cheating on tests and homework, incivility and other discipline issues) and non-violent crime. It is believed that these problems have as great an impact on the learning environment of schools as do the more sensational incidents reported in the press. Others have suggested revamping the entire system for measuring school safety so that the reporting systems are independent, objective, and open to public scrutiny. Still others have consistently pointed out that the school safety problem cannot be solved if it is relegated soley to school personnel or the school building--it must be understood within the context of the entire community.

In Florida, the School Environment Safety Incident Report (SESIR) system captures the current performance indicator for the state's school safety goal, as well as disciplinary actions. It is used to collect data on criminal, violent, or disruptive incidents on school grounds, during transportation to and from school, and at school-sponsored events, in any 24-hour period for the entire calendar year. Incidents are supposed to be reported even if the offender is unknown or if persons other than students are involved.

School discipline data is a part of grading a school's performance level, a measure of accountability. Chapter 99-398, L.O.F., created s. 229.57(7)&(8), F.S., to establish school performance grade category designations (letter grades "A," "B," "C," "D," and "F"), based on specific student assessment information and other appropriate performance data, including school discipline data. Rules to implement the new law are being developed and have not yet been adopted. Under current State Board Rule, the criteria related to attendance, discipline and dropping out (for high schools) only apply to schools at the level 5 designation (the equivalent of grade "A"). For these schools, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Brener, N.D., Simon, T.S., Krug, E.G., Lowry, R. "Recent Trends in Violence-Related Behaviors Among High Schools Students in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association*. August 4, 1999; 281: 440-446.

percentage of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions must be below the state average.

While homicides in schools remain rare, any violence in our schools is extremely disturbing. Accurate and reliable reporting of serious crimes and disciplinary actions is important to the school, parents, and the surrounding community. The task force heard testimony from some parents and school security personnel about the quality of SESIR data. Also, some task force members expressed concern that the use of school discipline data in grading Florida's schools may serve as a barrier to accurate reporting.

There are limitations on the interpretation and application of current SESIR data, including inaccurate applications of the state incident definitions and different reporting formats among districts. In particular, the Florida Department of Education cautions against making comparisons between schools in a single district and across districts, due to variations in the personnel making the reports and differences in the frequency of reporting.

#### **Student Services**

Another key issue is assuring that troubled children are identified and receive needed help. The risk factors associated with youth violence include:

- the individual (history of early aggression, beliefs supportive of violence, attributing hostility to others, social cognitive deficits);
- the family (problem parental behavior, low emotional attachments to parents or caregivers, poor monitoring and supervision of children, exposure to violence, poor family functioning);
- peers and school (negative peer influences, low commitment to school, academic failure, certain school environments and practices, such as undisciplined classrooms, lax enforcement of rules and policies, and crowded physical space); and
- the environment or neighborhood (high concentration of poor residents, high levels of transience, high levels of family disruption, low community involvement or participation, diminished economic opportunity, and access to firearms).<sup>5</sup>

In addition, other 'early warning signs' have been identified (e.g., social withdrawal, excessive feelings of isolation and being alone, excessive feelings of

solation and being alone, excessive feelings or

rejection, and uncontrolled anger). While these factors serve as an aid in identifying and referring children who may need help, it is generally considered inappropriate and even harmful to use these as a checklist against which to match individual children.

Mental health experts advocate that more counselors and mental health services are needed in schools to identify and provide early treatment to troubled children. In congressional meetings and discussions of the Florida Senate Task Force, testimony was given about the current workload and responsibilities of guidance counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers. School counselors testified about the lack of more direct contact with students, the number of assignments unrelated to their profession, and the high ratio of students to counselors.

The Florida Department of Education certifies guidance and counseling personnel, school psychologists, and school social workers. The following reflects the total number of school psychologists, guidance counselors, and school social workers in Florida, as well as the student-to-school psychologist ratio, the student-to-guidance counselor ratio, and the student-to-school social worker ratio:

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS<sup>7</sup>
TOTAL RATIO
1,011 1:2,310
GUIDANCE COUNSELORS
TOTAL RATIO
5,158 1:453
VISITING TEACHERS/SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS
TOTAL RATIO
786 1:2,971

The American School Counselor Association has recommendations for ratios to implement a standards-based, comprehensive school counseling program. The Association advocates that counselors spend 70-80% of their time in direct contact with students and recommends that the counselor's duties be limited to program delivery and direct counseling services. According to the Association, an ideal student-to-counselor ratio is 1 to 100, while the maximum student-to-counselor ratio is 1 to 300.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Congressional testimony, March 11, 1999, by the Director of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ratios calculated by Senate Education Committee staff, based on Florida Department of Education Membership by District, Survey 2 demographic data, October 5-9, 1998, as of December 9, 1998. This includes Dozier/Okeechobee, the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, and the laboratory schools.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> This includes psychologists, psychometrists, psychiatrists, and psychological social workers that provide psychological evaluative services to students.

Diverse legislative initiatives are currently pending to address concerns about student support services Legislation is currently pending in personnel. Congress to expand to secondary schools the provisions of law for elementary school counseling demonstration programs and set a recommended ratio of students to school psychologists (1 to 1000), school counselors (1 to 250), and school social workers (1 to 800) for these grants. Legislation is pending in the Florida Senate to create student services pilot programs. The legislative budget priorities for the Florida Department of Education for fiscal year 2000-2001 provide for safe schools intervention assistance teams. The budget initiative provides \$20,007,680 to fund additional student support services personnel to meet the school safety needs in each school improvement plan. Funding would be based on an approved plan, phasedin over three years, beginning with middle and alternative/special schools in fiscal year 2000-2001.

#### **Student Reporting**

Current law allows a school board, by resolution, to implement a student crime watch program to promote responsibility among students and to assist with the control of criminal behavior within the schools. Testimony was given to the task force about a student's role in reporting suspicious or dangerous behavior at school. Some presenters advocated for a toll-free hotline for student reporting.

The law (s. 230.23185(2) and (4), F.S.) provides for toll-free school safety hotlines and allows the Florida Department of Education to contract with the Florida Sheriffs Association to establish a statewide toll-free hotline to anonymously report incidents. According to the coordinator of the school safety hotline for the Florida Sheriff's Association Statewide Task Force, there are five school districts (Duval, Pinellas, Collier, Holmes, and Gilchrist) that are part of the current statewide hotline. There are other existing hotlines.

#### **Facilities and Training**

In public testimony to the task force, many presenters advocated for strong coordination with law enforcement and the frequent rehearsal of a school safety plan for a wide variety of emergency situations. Testimony was also provided on design strategies to enhance the security of new and existing school buildings.

Teacher training was singled out as an area of particular concern. Many presenters commented on the need for training teachers and other school personnel in diverse areas, such as identifying early warning signs, providing appropriate interventions for students with severe behavioral problems, safely intervening in fights, and responding to crisis situations, natural disasters, and other emergencies.

A good, thorough plan for school safety is critical. All personnel in the school, as well as local law enforcement, parents, teachers, and emergency management personnel should know about the plan and be trained to carry out their roles.

In constructing new schools, there are environmental design features that encourage school safety (e.g., landscaping for optimal visibility, limiting access to entries, exits, and other areas, protecting playgrounds by moving them away from fences, and eliminating problems with alcoves and other sheltered areas). Prior to building new schools, these features and other safety concerns need to be taken into consideration.

For existing schools, safety audits and assessments can be conducted to improve security. Law enforcement should be familiar with each school's physical plant. In some areas of the state, physical plant assessments are conducted with the assistance of school resource officers (SROs) or other law enforcement officers.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Funding**

The Legislature should:

- retain and increase the current state categorical fund for safe schools.
- continue to allow latitude at the local level for the decisions on which school safety approaches to implement; however, these decisions should be guided by research on best practices.
- require the development of best school safety and security practices for Florida by increasing the scope of the current best financial management practices reviews that are administered or conducted by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) to include safety and security.
- require an assessment of the extent to which best practices are currently being used and provide incentive funds for recipients that meet specific performance indicators.

# **Effective Programs**

To further facilitate coordination of efforts, the Legislature should establish a statewide coordinating council, partnership, or a commission, charged with the following:

- evaluate programs, based on controlled scientific research, and make recommendations to the clearinghouse and Legislature on funding issues;
- create an electronic clearinghouse of safety and security information, including best practices, model programs, and construction prototypes that are compatible with the requirements for frugal schools;
- train and offer technical assistance to school district staff on how to create a safe schools environment; and
- foster linkages with law enforcement personnel and crisis teams.

The Legislature should also direct the Department of Education to: develop an individualized school level safety and environment assessment instrument to use as a tool to assess school needs in relation to the state education goal for safety; and expand the existing performance standards for this goal.

### **Discipline**

The task force concluded that it would like to assist school districts that choose to use corporal punishment by providing the necessary tools to legally implement the policy.

#### **Zero Tolerance Policies**

Each school board should review its zero tolerance policy for dealing with weapons and firearms and handling bomb threats and consider adopting a policy that reflects concern for the seriousness of these offenses.

#### School Uniforms

The decision to require students to wear school uniforms should remain at the local level.

#### **School Safety Incident Reporting**

Each school should use a standardized reporting form and develop a plan to verify the accuracy of reported incidents. The Legislature should direct the Department of Education to establish a mechanism to further improve the reliability and accuracy of school safety data. The task force also recommends that the Legislature amend the law to remove school discipline data as a basis for grading a school's performance level.

#### **Student Services**

The Legislature should direct the Florida Department of Education to assess the effectiveness of current safety and security initiatives, including the impact of safe schools funding. Indicators for safe schools should be developed, including those related to:

- students involved in extracurricular activities:
- schools with student-developed plans for school safety;
- an optimal ratio of student-to-school psychologists, student-to-guidance counselors, and student-toschool social workers.

Funds should be provided for pilot projects to schools that agree to meet the ratio and achieve documented outcomes (e.g., reductions in truancy, school disciplinary referrals, increased academic performance, and increased parent, teacher, and administrator satisfaction).

#### **Student Reporting**

Schools should retain maximum flexibility in implementing hotline policies.

#### **Facilities and Training**

The Legislature should:

- consider mandating access by law enforcement personnel, the Florida Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and the local school superintendent's office to the blueprints of each school.
- create a public records exemption for these documents.
- establish training criteria for all new teachers and recommend reevaluation of the practice of placing new teachers into a hostile learning environment.
- create incentives for teachers of demonstrated mastery to remain in or transfer to low performing schools
- review incentives for teachers on the basis of their willingness to work at schools that serve a particular student poverty level (e.g., schools that serve low income areas).
- create support systems, such as providing mentors and specialized training, for teachers who are willing to work in schools that serve large populations of students from low income families.

The Department of Education should include the task force's concerns about teacher training in its review of chapter 231, F.S., relating to school system personnel.

#### COMMITTEE(S) INVOLVED IN REPORT (Contact first committee for more information.)

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#### MEMBER OVERSIGHT

Senate Task Force on School Safety: Senators Buddy Dyer and Jack Latvala (Co-Chairmen) and Senators Walter "Skip" Campbell, Lisa Carlton, Anna Cowin, James E. "Jim" King, Kendrick Meek, and Richard Mitchell